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John Morley: A Study in Victorianism

BY

J. L. MORISON

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JOHN MORLEY: A STUDY IN VICTORIANISM.

TWENTY-FIVE years ago, university men who cared to think for themselves found help and inspiration in a little treatise "On Compromise." Those were the days before the flood, when things intellectual were still held in esteem. We were living in arduous but not unhappy times. Our fathers had trained us in schools of early orthodoxy with a rigour and completeness which left ineffaceable impressions. Seriousness, an interest in fundamentals, a taste for moral responsibilities and for attempting difficult points in casuistry predominated then, in strange contrast with our modern bustle and flippancy. To all who shared this mood, John Morley's *Compromise* came with an extraordinary bracing effect. The very motto which adorned the title page—"It makes all the difference in the world whether we put Truth in the first place or the second place"—had its own message for us. It is easy to criticize the essay—its incompleteness: the detail of its casuistry: the typically English refusal to consider things in general and apart from circumstances. Yet the best answer to such criticism lay in the unique place which the book made for itself in the education of that generation.

No estimate of Lord Morley's place in his age, it seems to me, can stand which does not begin and end with life rather than with letters. He was the latest of a distinguished succession of teachers who helped to mould the last generation, and whose usefulness depended very largely on the spiritual experiences through which they themselves had passed. Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, Newman, and, in France, Renan, had one quality in common, in spite of fundamental differences—they had all been bred in some recognized school of religious orthodoxy; all of them had suffered some form, more or less violent, of conversion; and yet the message which they came to proclaim was in every case founded on the old training and temper. Carlyle could never escape from his Calvinistic youth any more than Newman could cease to be an Anglican under a cloud, or Arnold to be the son of his father, or Renan the pupil of Breton Catholicism.

Now Morley, while less in stature than the greatest of these Victorian converts, represented precisely the same temper and had passed through the same experience. His father, a Wesleyan doctor, who had taken to Anglicanism, was a strict religionist. "He sent me," says his son, "to an excellent school in Blackburn, kept by an Independent of much local renown for accurate teaching and severe exactitude in general habits. This school had a strong hold on me, for it abounded in the unadulterated milk of the Independent word, and perhaps accounted for nonconformist affinities in some of the politics of the days to come." It is not easy to understand the man or his influence, if we forget that dogmatic opinions are always the least important of the lessons which the great schools of Christian thought teach their young disciples. Of the intellectual influences then dominant in Britain, the Tractarians had already paid the penalty of a deficiency in understanding by ceasing to attract robust minds. Two other groups claimed the allegiance of the youth. On the one hand Thomas Carlyle dominated half the intellectual world with his spiritual dictatorship. In Scotland probably every reader of more than average intelligence was, temporarily at least, a devout Carlylean, and in England Ruskin and Froude led ill-assorted flocks in the same direction. Indeed it was difficult for anyone to escape completely from that masterful influence. Morley himself, than whom there is no more trenchant critic of Carlyle's message, admits "that whatever later teachers may have done in definitely shaping opinion . . . here was the friendly fire-bearer who first conveyed the Promethean spark, here the prophet who first smote the rock." He never denied Carlyle's claim to be the greatest man of letters of the day, and to the end he has a trick of defining his own position in contradistinction to some maxim or doctrine of this "lost leader."

But temper and mental habits flung him into the other recognized assembly of the thoughtful—the school of John Stuart Mill. Deficiency in natural piety never was one of Morley's defects, and there are few finer pages in his writings than those which reveal the depth of his affection for his master. That age, in spite of all its critics, was profoundly

scientific, rational, and analytic. Darwin, Kelvin, Tyndall, and that Rupert of scientific debate, Huxley, provided new facts, and Spencer, Stuart Mill, and in politics the Manchester School, attempted rational criticism of the old and synthesis of the new. Even Oxford found it difficult to escape the scientific contagion of the day, although like Disraeli it inclined to side with the angels of orthodoxy. Gradually little groups established themselves—the *élite* of young thinking England, and to the most distinguished of these Morley joined himself. His natural taste for regular intellectual processes, his interest in things continental, a certain vestige of the old Adam in him, nearly rushed him into the church of Positivism and Comte; but the robust influence of fellow-seekers after truth like Huxley kept him from ever becoming more than a proselyte of the gate in that system of “Catholicism minus Christianity.”

The men with whom he came to be associated on the *Fortnightly Review* and elsewhere, played a distinguished part in the belles lettres and controversy of the day: Huxley, shrewd, witty, born for debate and provided with only too many targets for his unsanctified humour; Leslie Stephen, manliest of thinkers, and persecutor of literary hypocrisies; Meredith, that strange mixture of eccentric imagination and clear-eyed reason; and half-a-dozen others, all of them disciples of John Stuart Mill, and all bent on the work of clarifying English thought from hypocrisy and of establishing some new positive basis in place of obsolete orthodoxies.

Morley's part in the work of this nineteenth century illumination was various and distinguished. He edited the *Fortnightly Review* during the most influential period of its history: he published studies of the greater literary figures in eighteenth century France, and occasional criticisms of notable names in contemporary English letters; and assisted, more particularly in the “English Men of Letters” series, to give the Macmillans their position of supremacy in the publishing world.

It is no simple matter to fix the criterion by which to judge the Morley of the literary period. Tested by the strictest canons of literary art, he was only a notable, industrious,

but passing figure in English letters. As historian of the French illuminists, he accomplished work which still stands alone in English criticism of the subject. But one's romantic fancy sometimes pictures what could have been done had his imagination fused all these special studies into one. Here was the chance for a new Gibbon to write *The Decline and Fall of the French Monarchy*—with emphasis on the place of thought in shaping history. But the central fusing fire was absent: the work remains sober, interesting, but fragmentary. The truth is that the decisive qualities which raise the greater critics into the regions of constructive work are poetic and imaginative: and Morley never attained the standing of the poet. His heroic fidelity to Reason cost him all those graces and powers which Imagination showers on those who are not afraid to trust her. It is natural to think of him in conjunction with Matthew Arnold. Both of them had been trained in sound schools of moral earnestness, and both had been constrained to use their education to relieve men from the bonds of old doctrine. Both had high standards to set before contemporary English culture. Both used literature as their medium for evangelizing their generation. But one had received the divine spark of poetic imagination: the other had only his poor reason to assist him in accomplishing his ambition. In concentration of mind, and industry, and all the qualities which carry men to the frontiers of genius, our author was undoubtedly the better man. He judged, saw both the limits and the positive virtues of his subjects; and the moral weight and verbal dignity of his studies place them second only to the highest. But he had nothing of that intuitive genius which took Carlyle naturally and without effort to the heart of his heroes: his very balance of mind deprived him of the pungent originality which will always make a few of Lord Acton's occasional essays more notable achievements than all the volumes of his more prolific fellow-historians.

To revert to the comparison with Arnold, there is nothing in all his sober excellent pages which haunts us as does a certain famous rhapsody on Oxford. He knew like Arnold the temper of his age: its struggles, pathos, and achievements. But it was not given him to tell all he knew in words which

posterity would continue to cherish. Already it is only an occasional diligent and enquiring student who will care to finger the volumes in which John Morley gave his prose version of the same story. Lacking this shaping spirit of imagination, Morley's literary criticism lacked also the kindly gleam of humour. His master, John Stuart Mill, had passed through an education which atrophied any sense of the ridiculous which nature may have given him; and disciples of the Utilitarian school took life too seriously to see the fun of it. They were so busy helping lame dogs over stiles that they had no time to sit down and look about, and rest, and laugh. Besides this, Morley was from first to last a rhetorician, and orators labour in elevated and enthusiastic regions where humour seems out of place. It is only your poet, hand in hand with living realities, and conscious of the absurdities and inconsistencies which happily relieve the high seriousness of existence, who can venture to appear in *deshabille*, and show the gods dissolved in inextinguishable laughter.

I am not sure that another very admirable quality does not interfere with Morley's merely literary execution—the fullness of his mind. From first to last he has written like a man with a mission and a message. Even in his most objective work in French literature, some pithy comment or glowing declaration of faith comes to remind the reader that the author has a view reaching beyond his immediate subject. With something of the moral unction of his nonconformist teachers, Morley the critic loved to pass his judgments and point his morals. There was not a little of the perverted evangelist about him and the taste for dabbling in reflections on life grew with his years. Like sentimentality, moralizing blunts the finer edge of the critic's instrument. And yet, more especially in his later essays, the habit contributed more than it took away. I well remember the impulsive scorn with which an Italian friend read his study of Machiavelli.—“He does not understand,” said he, “I could smack him.” The premeditated assault was not altogether undeserved; and yet the moralizing habit had its own advantages. Here was a man of state, trained in a broader world than Macchiavelli, democrat to the other's autocrat, giving his version of

the motives of public men. If, like the older preachers, our evangelist often uses his text as a peg for general reflections, I am not sure that the reflections are not sometimes better than the text itself.

But already we are threatening to part with John Morley, the literary man; and before we pass into a very different region and judge a very different character, a final word in appreciation is necessary. When the *advocatus diaboli* had said his worst of Morley's purely literary work, it is still true that that work cannot quite be relegated to the comfortable and not inglorious limbo, where linger the shades of the essays of Walter Bagehot, R. H. Hutton, and, shall I say, Lord Macaulay. Our author was once described by a pugnacious believer as "a writer who pretercalmly, subsilently, superpersuasively, but subtly and potently, is exercising influence on the most advanced and most earnest thought of the present generation; who by a refined destructive criticism is solving the faith of thousands, is not contributing an iota to the reconstruction of a systematic body of thought, which can help the educator in floating the tiniest skiff on the troubled waters of life." Men whom he helped will put the point a little differently. In those days before the flood, we were honestly puzzled, and we had no authorized guides who could help us. Our ecclesiastical leaders were too deeply engrossed in practical manipulations and in blunting the keen edge of theological speculation; our philosophers seemed to be practising the art of saying one thing and meaning another—when indeed they were not wrapping up simple truth in some clumsy and elaborate disguise; and all the time necessity was calling on us to decide on matters which involved our intellectual honour and where delay was impossible. Then we stumbled across this writer, who, while speaking of dead, and possibly damned, Frenchmen, had still a word for us. His pages were so permeated with the desire for truth and honesty; he was so frank in confessing the doubt and ignorance which orthodoxy had spent its best efforts in disguising; he represented so exactly our mood of questioning, and dim search for fact, and resolute struggle with error, that we took him instinctively to our hearts. Churchmen might talk of his unbelief, and official

philosophy distrust so faithful a follower of John Stuart Mill; but we had already offered ourselves at the doors of intellectual respectability, and had heard the elect practising all the arts of economy of truth; had seen them making futile efforts to insert false bottoms in the abyss. So, in spite of all their warnings, we put John Morley in their place, because, to paraphrase his own words, "no single page or phrase or passing mood of his either dimmed the lamp of loyalty to Reason, or disheartened earnest and persistent zeal for wise politics in younger readers with their lives before them." Still, as moral beneficiaries, we have no claim to defend the literary immortality of our benefactor; and an intimate acquaintance with the minds which conquered Germany suggests that our prophet's day is over, in the new age when public men are too busy doing things to care for reflection, and young men leave truth at the bottom of her well, in their pursuit of nymphs of a less retiring disposition.

I come now to the second and more distinguished phase of our author's career. Few men have presented a less changing front to the world, or have spoken in tones which varied less with the changing fortunes of life. Yet there came a time when Lord Morley's environment suffered so complete a transformation, and the men with whom he worked in harness changed so entirely, that he could not but change with his fortunes. The essayist retired, and the publicist appeared. The earnest author became the chief lieutenant of a great politician in his last campaigns, the political tutor of a parliamentary party, and, incidentally, the historian of his time.

The friend and follower of Stuart Mill could not but interest himself in public life, and from the first the world of politics exercised its subtle temptations on the author. In 1869 and 1880 Morley had contested unsuccessfully seats at Blackburn and Westminster. In the latter year he had accepted the editorship of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, then at the height of its reputation, and, for a few years, a recognized organ of Gladstonian Liberalism. But it was the election to a seat at Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1883 which he himself marks as the fresh starting-point of his public life. Between that day and his retirement from office on the outbreak of war, he

acquired with constantly increasing momentum the character of a political leader, and became the chief literary spokesman of British Liberalism.

The character of the literary politician may be regarded in either of two ways. He may be the man of letters, flinging himself into practical affairs, as when Edmund Burke placed himself at the disposal of the Rockingham Whigs; or, on the other hand, the statesman, turning from men and measures, to give his views or recollections literary expression, as Clarendon did when he became the historian of the Great Rebellion. Lord Morley's reputation must depend ultimately on his work in both these fields; but in 1883 it was naturally the man of letters who first appeared, interesting himself in practical politics.

The position had its obvious disadvantages. Disraeli with his gift of quick and cynical insight had transfixed Mill, when first he entered Westminster, with one of his phrases—"the finishing governess." That pointed to the inclination of the converted literary man to adopt the primness of the maiden aunt, and display a passion for political pedagogy, relished neither by Whig aristocrats nor by ordinary men of business.

Two illustrious predecessors naturally tempt the critic to comparisons here. Burke had devoted his great literary powers to the service of an eighteenth century English party, and Benjamin Disraeli, from being novelist, had become the restorer of nineteenth century British conservatism. In spite of conspicuous errors and follies in executive work the former had become the political tutor of two generations of British statesmen. The latter had ultimately consigned his literary labours to the background of his life, and had become absorbed in the education and organization of his party. And both had proved the value of literature as a training ground for parliamentary rhetoric.

In a sense Lord Morley never attained the illustrious position of the other two. Curiously enough he was not fated, as were Burke and Disraeli, to assume an absolute lead in some political department. As a radical adventurer, he took place after both Chamberlain and Dilke; as parliamentary liberal his light was dimmed by the immense illumination of

Mr. Gladstone; as orator he never attained John Bright's simplicity, or Gladstone's subtlety and occasional majesty of diction. It may be said that in practical affairs Burke was never more than a party hack to Rockingham and Fox; but then no one ever questioned his absolute supremacy as the mind and voice of his party, and he stood alone in the great impeachment as the prophet of Indian reform. Even in Irish affairs, where Parnell himself acknowledged that "Mr. Morley was perhaps the only Liberal in Parliament whose record on the Irish question has been consistent from first to last," and where his chief certainly owed more to him than the great biography permits us to know, he will stand in history only as Gladstone's chief of staff. The great man, in politics as in letters, cannot but reap where he has not strawed. Yet Morley, like his hero Burke, became a kind of conscience to his party, and exercised an influence not dissimilar. It is true that in 1886, when old connexions were being severed, Chamberlain told Morley "that his speeches were foolish and mischievous and that he was talking literary nonsense—the worst of all." It is also true that in two vital departments, imperial politics and the future of labour, he proved disastrously inadequate. Seldom have events more completely disproved political criticism than have recent evidences of British imperial solidarity the pessimism expressed in his review of Seeley's *Expansion of England*; and the frank willingness to learn, the quick instinct for reading new needs, and that modesty which led Sir Charles Dilke to act as parliamentary spokesman of Labour only so long as it stood in need of an interpreter, make the juxtaposition of the two radical leaders not altogether flattering to Morley.

Yet, in a sense, both of these misjudgments sprang from the greatest principle he had to teach to, or to confirm in, his colleagues and his party—the place of Liberty in politics. He stood, as did his leader, for something richer in content than is conveyed in the old phrase "*Laissez faire*." It was no negative political virtue he preached, but a principle as complicated and expansive as its companion phrases, Civilization and Christianity. For Morley, Liberty was the positive temper which desired, not merely the destruction of obsolete

nuisances, but the quiet careful collection and use of all new facts; it was the sympathy for peoples struggling for freedom to express themselves in politics in their own way; it was the spirit of tolerance which always seems the last virtue to be acquired by religious and political organizations; and it took as its material embodiment that system of government by discussion and the counting of votes, in deriding which fools usually and chiefly display their folly, and which knaves attack on their way to private plunder. No one, not even Mr. Gladstone himself, preached this form of Liberalism so consistently, so practically, and yet with so fine a sense of the complications and temporary limitations of the subject. It was this which made his work for Ireland permanently useful, whatever the issue or lack of issue of the Irish question may be, and it was this which illuminated his latest work on Indian government. His influence was not restrained within the limits of his party. There is a quaint comment which a lady friendly both to him and to Arthur Balfour made on his attitude while the latter was speaking: "You had a look of pride as of an elder brother on one who knew his business and was doing it in good style." Not a little of the pardonable complacency which strikes the reader of the Reminiscences comes from this sense of fatherhood in principles: it is the deep satisfaction of one watching from the evening shade of his vine and fig trees a prosperous family sporting in the foreground.

As man of letters, too, he did something to prolong the reign of scholarship as an essential in British statesmen. They no longer quote Lucretius in Parliament; and the cries and jargon of the music-hall resound now in the cabinet. But to the end of his reign as last possessor of the great old style in oratory, Morley spoke with a flavour of letters in his phrases, and like Burke and Bright his speeches read as soundly as they were moving to hear. His little volume of Indian orations make no negligible addition to the library, whose chief glories are the philippics of Burke against Warren Hastings, and the speech of Sheridan on the Begums of Oudh. Government by business experts on principles approved by the man in the street affects to disregard fine phrases, but the

art which statesmen from Pericles to Lincoln did not despise on their way to their great purposes is likely to survive the cheap disdains of the moment.

As his thirty years of manful service passed towards their middle and end, Lord Morley gradually assumed that place, and accomplished that work, by which he is most likely to be remembered among new generations—the place of the statesman fitted to speak adequately of state affairs, the work of so recording public events that posterity should understand the actual motives which inspired them.

There is no gift so rare as the perfect fusion of the statesman and the author. Gladstone, who must be counted a voluminous author, never appeared so like a mind of the second class as when he wrote, and the glittering phrases of Disraeli's novels are tawdry adornments for a conservative Prime Minister. In Britain perhaps Bacon and Clarendon alone wrote of public things in language not unworthy of their subject. There is a potency and a weight about the Baconian sentences which convey something of the complexity and dignity of the statesman's mind, and the lightest student of Clarendon realizes that it was a master of men and motives who penned the glorious character studies of his contemporaries. Two works of Lord Morley have this true ring of statesmanship, and by those two, set in their context of Victorian events, is he certain of such immortality as common men of genius are likely to secure—his recent *Reminiscences* and his *Life of Gladstone*.

I have included his *Reminiscences* because the Victorian age has now taken its place beside those of Elizabeth and Anne as a distinct epoch in history, and because Lord Morley's book offers by far the most intimate and penetrating criticism of the time. It is the republic described by the last of the Romans. There are sketches in it of merely common interest, correspondence with India and diaries of life in Ireland; but the main substance of his two volumes offers a study of his age almost as memorable, although hardly as monumental, as Clarendon's Rebellion. It may be said that Victoria and Gladstone compare poorly with Charles I and Strafford, and that the Irish Home Rule Bill is unlikely to appeal so much

to the imagination of posterity as the Great Rebellion. But no contemporary account of any age ever quite fades into obscurity, and this is the history of a notable time, written with intimate knowledge of the chief actors and in a style not lower than the best. It has the extraordinary advantage of belonging to the years which it chronicles, and yet appearing after the new age had drawn up its blustering indictment of Victorian ways.

His apologia for Victorianism has already silenced some of the chief critics. In the midst of the modern vulgar Babel of literature, the exquisite rationality, the sweetness and light of Morley's literary heroes, Meredith, Mill, Arnold, and the others, come as sunlight and fresh air do to those who have just emerged from the saw-dust, smells, and twilight of a travelling menagerie. The political leaders and principles of that day restore belief, shaken by the great war and the doubtful peace, in the place of reason and the ancient courtesies of life. Their time stands as one of high seriousness, fortunate in having found a historian dignified enough to tell its story worthily. In place of the smug obscurantism which some modern novelists and dramatists would have us accept as the chief characteristic of the past, the *Reminiscences* recall the simple patient love of fact which inspired Darwin and the Victorian scientists in their momentous researches; the profound self-criticism which Carlyle and Ruskin and Arnold directed towards the faults of Britain as they knew it; the rational spirit of reform in which Mill, and Cobden, and a host of social and political radicals worked to clear away the rubbish of centuries as a preliminary to new construction. Passion for new truth, intolerance of easy solutions, an acute sense of self-criticism stand out in Lord Morley's pages as the note of his old teachers and colleagues.

Complacent in a sense his picture is: but as magnanimity is the proper virtue of men of action, a certain heroic complacency is an essential in the historian who would produce a masterpiece. Our author has sinned in company with Gibbon and Macaulay. And it is something higher than complacency which comes to close the story: "Some ages are marked as sentimental, others stand conspicuous as rational.

The Victorian age was happier than most in the flow of both these currents into a common stream of vigorous and effective talent. New truths were welcomed in free minds, and free minds make brave men. Old prejudices were disarmed. Fresh principles were set afloat, and supported by the right reasons. The standards of ambition rose higher and purer. Men learned to care more for one another. Sense of proportion among the claims of leading questions to the world's attention became more wisely tempered. . . . "The nobler a soul is, the more objects of compassion it hath." This of the Elizabethan was one prevailing note in our Victorian age. The splendid expansion and enrichment of Toleration, and all the ideas and modes that belong to Toleration was another."

There is an even more important document of the Victorian age to lay before the immortals on Lord Morley's behalf—he is the author of the greatest political biography in the English language. In most cases biographies of the official kind are mill-stones round the necks both of their authors and their subjects. Less than a score survive to testify that their writers were not bores, and of these some poor half-dozen may stand as literature. Boswell's revivification of his hero's fading reputation belongs to a category of its own. But after Boswell I do not see how the biography of Gladstone can take lower than second place.

Greatness in biography is due to other causes besides the skill of the biographer. There are the proportions of the hero; his faculty for self-expression in letters and diaries; the arena where he fought his battle; the quality of the minor characters in the drama. Now in all these things Lord Morley had a good fortune, deserved but still amazing. Think as we please of Gladstone, he was the foremost Briton of his day. His interests from the first were commensurate with those of Britain—at times with those of Europe. If his letters sometimes lack the intimacy of the quieter domestic life, they and his diaries were adequate to the high ends which they described. He had known every figure of any importance in Europe between 1840 and 1890, and his influence, fortunate or unfortunate, had told on all the issues of British government through these years. There was indeed a real danger

to his biographer in all this wealth of material. "The first quality required," says Lord Morley, "was architectonic; it lay in distribution of periods and phases; the right scale for a thousand episodes, right proportions among wide and varied fields of incessant public policy and personal activity. To overmaster and compress the raw material and to produce from it the lineaments of a singularly subtle and elastic mind, and the qualities of one of the most powerful and long-lived athletes that ever threw himself into the parliamentary arena—*hic labor, hoc opus.*"

Not even the immense volume of the result—but there is not a page one willingly would spare—can conceal the triumph of the biographer. He has succeeded in the delicate balance between the man and his time—an unusually difficult task when the hero lived so much in public. With even greater skill he has kept the biographer in his place, without condescending to that ignoble surrender in which writers as notable as Dean Stanley have allowed cold slabs of correspondence, unrelated to narrative, to strike the pen out of their hands. Like Charles II's little Sidney Godolphin, the biographer of Gladstone is never in the way, and never out of the way.

In the midst, too, of serious public events, we are called aside to hear accounts of Gladstone's personal characteristics, his correspondents and correspondence, his religious interests, and, in some charming chapters, of visits to and talks with the old hero at the end of his life. Not one of these occasional chapters but has a freshness, interest, and literary power which far transcend the conscientious and laboured work of the author's early days.

The truth is that here is the *opus magnum* for which Fate had been training one of her favourites. He had graduated in a severe school of letters, only to be despatched headlong into a very different world of men and affairs. And before the fineness had deserted his pen, or the freshness his impressions of a world of action, at the time in his life when the mature wisdom of the elder statesman had not yet suffered from the lessened energy of old age, he came to write of the most interesting political personality of the century. He wrote as only a statesman could who had learned to weigh motives, and understand in what fashion men of state conduct

their lives. He need not fear a rival—at least not until another Gladstone finds a biographer in another Morley.

To a panegyric so unrestrained the cautious critic will naturally suggest some limitations. Immortality in letters is a precious and infrequent attribute, and biographers or memoir writers are not usually favoured by the muses. But even if one forgets the certainty of Boswell's reputation, there is another kind of fame, which, as I have suggested, depends as much upon the subject as on the author. Walpole was a very minor star in the literary firmament, but so long as the eighteenth century holds the interest of posterity, the *Letters* and *Memoirs* will continue to be read; and Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, with all its faults, will share such immortality as lies in store for the author of the Waverley novels. Now it is hard to believe that the age of Victoria will have less claim on the interest of posterity than that of Hanoverian England, and, in his own sphere, Gladstone was as illustrious a figure as Scott. Even if the *Life of Gladstone* and the *Reminiscences* were less notable performances than they are, they would still have the contingent immortality which must belong to the statesman and the age which they commemorate—they have become, in a sense, historic facts which nothing can displace.

But, persists the critic, these are mere party pamphlets—one in complacent appreciation of Victorian literature, the other of Mr. Gladstone's Irish policy. That, even if it were true, is really beside the point. Prejudiced or party statements have exactly the literary value which attaches to their authors, their subjects, and the fashion in which they are set forth. Clarendon's *History of the Great Rebellion* is nothing but a great cavalier pamphlet. Swift's *Conduct of the Allies* is still acknowledged by the student of Augustan England, although its prejudices are trivial and its statements misleading. Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution* is a glorified tract written on what men now confess to be the wrong side. In all these cases the very vigour of their author's party feelings adds something vivid, fresh, and passionate. Even if pride and prejudice were less genuine literary assets than they are, there is nothing so valuable to succeeding ages as adequate and even unrestrained statements of contemporary opinion.

The most reasonable charge against the *Life of Gladstone* seems to me to lie rather in the over-idealization of its hero—as men would rather look at one of Holbein's living realistic studies than at Watts's portraits, shining with the light that never was on sea or land or on his heroes' living countenances. Literary human nature has a curiously obscene and dog-like scent for concrete trifles; prefers the Pitt whose last recorded words were a wish for one of Bellamy's pork pies; gloats over Henry VIII's stoutness and wives rather than over his imperial policy; and knows Wellington better through his hooked nose and manly curses than in his despatches. But if we have to go to Tenniel's cartoons for the gleaming eyes and pointed collars of the hero; even if it is Dilke, not Morley, who reminds us that Gladstone once entered himself in the books of Grillion as having drunk a bottle of sherry and another of champagne at a sitting, it is not true that the great biography lacks realistic detail. In any case Morley's hero lived more constantly in a mood of moral elevation than any other modern save Mazzini; and any picture of him would have been incorrect, which distracted the spectator from the noble bearing, and commanding eye, by pointing to the colour of the tie or the boots he wore.

I am conscious that as this study has proceeded, the subject of it has receded as a force dependent simply on itself for recognition. We have passed from the single-minded literary critic of Voltaire and Rousseau to the statesman and writer who has become a part of all that he has met. But it is just in proportion as he entered into partnership with his age, that he came to share the immortality which is the attribute of actual facts. "*Diu multumque vixi*," he has written with pardonable complacency. "It has been my fortune to write some pages that found and affected their share of readers: to know and work on close terms with many men wonderfully well worth knowing; to hold responsible offices in the State; to say things in popular assemblages that made a difference."

There are many mansions in Parnassus. In that reserved for Lord Morley and his friends the post-ambrosial talk will be long and good; and the gods themselves may feel a little jealous of the moral standing of their protégés.

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